



# ***SKRYABIN & THE PIANO***



An introduction to Alexander Skryabin  
and his piano music

# Stuart Scott

# SKRYABIN & THE PIANO

*An introduction to Alexander Skryabin  
and his piano music*

STUART SCOTT



*He dared to melt the metal of melodies  
and to cast it in new forms.*

*He aspired to the lofty aims:  
to praise the God and to illuminate  
the spirit by means of sound.*

*(Valery Bryusov)*

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Alexander Skryabin was born in Moscow on 6th January 1872 (Christmas Day 1871 - old calendar) and almost before completing his studies at the Moscow Conservatory, he had begun a career as piano virtuoso which he continued practically until his death in 1915. During his lifetime he wrote more than a hundred works, most of which were piano solos showing much evolution of style. His early works show influences of Chopin, Liszt and Wagner, whilst the later ones approach atonality and although he turned to orchestral writing from 1890 onwards producing some massive scores, the bulk of his output remained loyal to the piano.

Skryabin seems to have inherited all his musical talent from his mother who had been one of Leschetitzsky's most brilliant pupils. One year after Alexander's birth she died of consumption and his father returned to Saratof where he had secured a post in the Diplomatic Service, leaving Skryabin in the care of his grandmother and aunt. From an early age he was taken to the Imperial Moscow Opera House where the young boy was fascinated by the orchestra rather than what was happening on stage and by the age of eight his acute ear and musical memory astonished his elders. It is reported that as a child he heard his aunt play a Govotte by Bach and the Gondelier's Song by Mendelssohn and then immediately sat down at the piano and reproduced them exactly.

At the age of ten Skryabin was admitted into the Cadet's School where he was popular for his piano playing more than anything else. He took piano lessons with N.S.Zverev who prepared him for the conservatoire and although his hands could never span more than an octave, he was

already recognised by fellow pupils and teachers as a pianist of some considerable talent. At the conservatoire he studied piano with Vassily Safanov, counterpoint with Taneyev and composition with Arensky who failed to find any remarkable symptoms for composition.

When Skryabin graduated from the conservatoire at the age of twenty he had already written a number of fine piano pieces, mostly preludes, impromptus and mazurkas, which appeared in print as his Opp.3, 5, and 7, but his career as concert pianist had already received a serious setback. He had damaged his right hand in overpractice of Balakirev's *Islamey* and Liszt's *Don Juan Fantasia* which he played for his final graduation recital in an attempt to outplay Josef Lhevinne, a fellow pupil of considerable talent. During a long period of rest Skryabin concentrated on his left hand technique which is said to account for the difficult left hand parts in his piano works and for the two beautiful pieces for left hand alone, Op.9.

In 1894 Skryabin gave a recital of his own works in Petersburg which was attended by M. P. Belaiev, the wealthy publisher. He arranged to take on the composer's works and offered him concert tours in Russia and western Europe for which Skryabin played recitals consisting of only his own works. Three years later, against the wishes of his relatives he married Vera Ivanova Isakovich, a brilliant pianist who later collaborated in his recitals. Many works for piano and his Piano Concerto Op.20 followed but Skryabin found it necessary to take on a professorship at the Moscow Conservatory. Finding the work troublesome and time consuming he resigned his post in 1903 and turned his attention more to orchestral composition and it is from this date that we can recognise the development of a more personal idiom in his compositions.

His resignation from the Conservatory brought about the composition of approximately forty new pieces for the piano including the Fourth Sonata, and at the same time he worked on his third symphony.

Further changes in his life took place at this time too, for he became more preoccupied with philosophy and decided to move his home to the shores of Lake Geneva in Switzerland where he finished the third symphony. He had travelled there with Vera and his children but their family life soon came to an end as a former pupil and admirer, Tatiana Schloezer, followed him to Switzerland and Skryabin left Vera and the children to travel to France with her.

In the spring of 1905 Arthur Nikisch gave Skryabin's third symphony (*The Divine Poem*) its first performance in Paris where it is said that Skryabin was introduced to Theosophy which fired his ideas and personal philosophy of art as transformer of the human race. Soon after the premiere of his third symphony Skryabin and Tatiana went to Italy where they remained for almost a year living in a small villa near Genoa and Skryabin planned his next orchestral work, *The Poem of Ecstasy*. The couple had little money to live on at this time so the offer for a visit to America from Paul Altschuler who had formed the Russian Symphony Society in New York, was quickly accepted.

Skryabin arrived in New York alone in November 1906 and after attending two orchestral concerts in Carnegie Hall, he gave recitals in New York, Chicago and Detroit. In January the following year Tatiana arrived in America to join him but it wasn't long before threatening unpleasantness towards the couple forced a hasty return to Paris where Nikisch gave the third symphony again along with a performance of the Piano Concerto with Josef Hofmann as soloist. Skryabin and Tatiana returned to Switzerland once again soon after the performances and there the composer completed his *Poem of Ecstasy* and wrote the *Fifth Sonata*, the latter being completed within only a few days. Both works are related not only musically but through a long literary poem, with the same title as the orchestral work, expressing the mystical joy of creation.

In 1908 Skryabin met Koussevitzky who took over from Belaiev as

concert manager and publisher. A return to Moscow the following year was arranged and performances of the Poem of Ecstasy in Moscow and St.Petersburg brought Skryabin to the forefront of composers of his generation. In 1910 he went on tour once again, accompanying Koussevitzky and his orchestra to towns and cities along the River Volga, and Skryabin was soloist in many successful performances of his Piano Concerto.

That same year Skryabin travelled to Brussels and there he worked on his last orchestral work, Prometheus: The Poem of Fire Op.60 and also took the opportunity of discussing his 'synthesis of the arts' philosophy and preparing some of the text for a massive work he called 'The Mystery', yet to be composed. After the first performance of Prometheus, given by Koussevitzky in Moscow, March 1911, Skryabin returned to the piano composing in a style which had left tonality far behind. The short pieces of this period are but fragments or sketches for his projected Mystery which totally absorbed him in the last years of his life. However, he continued to travel and perform, visiting London in 1914, where he appeared as soloist in Prometheus: The Poem of Fire, and gave recitals at the Bechstein Hall.

Returning to Russia the following year he gave his last three piano recitals in St.Petersburg before undergoing several unsuccessful operations on his upper lip to stem septicaemia caused by a carbuncle. He died in Moscow on April 27th 1915 leaving only a short piece of text and a few fragments of music in manuscript to represent what was to have been his greatest project - The Mystery.



*A. Scriabin*



## THE PERFORMER

Alexander Skryabin made a great reputation for himself as a concert pianist and he managed to do this during a golden age of pianism when Rachmaninov, Lhevinne and Hofmann were playing and the public were used to hearing such giants of the keyboard. This fact in itself suggests that Skryabin was, from early in his career, a pianist of some calibre.

There is no shortage of comment by writers or musicians who knew Skryabin, worked with him or heard him play, attesting to his outstanding abilities as performer or composer. Indeed, Safanov who championed Skryabin at the turn of the century and performed his orchestral music as often as he could, called him "a great pianist and a great composer", and Montague Nathan writing in 1917 maintained that he showed "exceptional talent as an executant", and that it was this that contributed to the establishment of his world wide reputation.

Skryabin never played any other composer's music after his conservatoire recitals and he was never without his critics whose bad reviews were based on their dislike or misunderstanding of his music as much as his piano technique. Critics who wrote enthusiastically about his recitals usually showed some insight into his work as a composer, but without doubt he had a highly personal style of playing which suited his own music admirably.

After his last piano recital given in Moscow in 1915, Grigori Prokofiev writing for the Russian Musical Gazette said - "What makes Skryabin's music ravishing is simply the enchantment of his performance.

The tone is marvellous, despite a continuous sharpness, even clanging 'mezzo piano', but he achieves extraordinary effects. Don't forget he is a wizard with the pedal, though his ethereal sounds cannot quite fit the hall. He breaks the rhythmic flow and something new comes out each time. This suffuses the performance with freshness. Never has he played his 'Fourth Sonata' with a more mastery or sincerity as he did yesterday. What power he put in the theme in the second movement! Yet the actual sound was not big. The secret is in the energetic rhythm".

The complaints of some other critics are apparently borne out by the only remaining record of his playing which are transcriptions of his performances from Welte-Mignon piano rolls, reissued on disc in recent years. Although they seem to confirm a nervous, erratic and arrhythmical approach to performance, one must remember that the recordings were reconstructed by engineers through mechanical means and this is never more apparent than in the pedalling to be heard on these recordings. They only serve to show certain aspects of his approach in a purely clinical manner without having the means of combining these (mainly by Skryabin's individual use of the pedal) to form an overall sound picture. It must also be remembered that tempos could be affected by the piano roll recording method and with so many variables, one cannot rely on the result as being totally representative of Skryabin's performance.

It is well known that Skryabin did not play a piece in the same way at each performance. He played according to mood declaring that "a piano composition is many faceted.....alive and breathes on its own. It is one thing today, and another tomorrow, like the sea. How awful it would be if the sea were the same every day and the same forever, like a movie film!" It is also well known that Skryabin's playing was extremely free as far as rhythm is concerned and there is still a Russian tradition in playing his music in a kind of 'sempré rubato', but there is of course, still the virtually unanswered question about his own approach. Skryabin did not use the direction, 'rubato' in any of his manuscripts but maybe he assumed that

pianists would approach his music in that style. Alternatively of course, rhythmical accuracy could have been a weakness in him as a performer, particularly as it is reported that he played other composer's music with an unsteady rhythm. But Skryabin's music depends so much on rhythm for good effect that it is difficult to imagine a concert pianist at the turn of the century being able to get away with this and still cause so much interest and excitement whenever he played.

In 1916, a well respected piano teacher in Petrograd, N. N. Cherkass, published a book entitled, "Scriabin as Pianist and Piano Composer". Here he went to great lengths to point out, giving reasons, why he thought Skryabin was a bad pianist, but the book does contain a certain objectivity which is useful to the musicologist. However, even he seems to contradict himself on some points, particularly when criticising Skryabin's pedal technique. He writes, "He (Skryabin) took his foot off the pedal only to put it down again but in rare instances played entirely without pedal." He maintains that had Skryabin been capable of a correct legato, he would not have overused the pedal. But later, when Cherkass speaks of harmonic control he says, "Skryabin had an amazing ability. His innate sensitivity to harmonic clarity kept him in line.....He could separate voices clearly".

Skryabin would use the pedal to help create the desired effect for his compositions. The pedal was a necessity for his slow changing harmonies. The use of the pedal in his music is not always for a legato effect, but mostly for sustaining harmonies, and often there are staccato notes played above a held sonority creating tonal balances and sustained effects not previously used by other composers. It is possible to think of him playing in a kind of very clear, transparent way to achieve an effect, but much of his music calls for a lot of sustained atmospheric sonorities.

It is clear from Skryabin's compositions that he was a master when it came to pedal techniques and tonal balance, and according to Cherkass and others, he played with great accuracy, placing him amongst the great

virtuosos of his day. There is no doubt also, that he created a great impression on his audiences, his magnetism and wizardry causing Sabaneyev to describe his performances as "secret liturgical acts" where listeners felt "electric currents touching their psyche". During his performing career, Skryabin was looked upon as a magician of the keyboard, producing effects that no one else could ever hope for, even when performing his music sympathetically.

His reputation as a composer and a pianist went hand in hand and we should not perhaps try to evaluate Skryabin's piano technique when compared to other virtuosos who were performing music of quite different character, but it is interesting to note that his unique voice as a composer required a new technique from the performer. Skryabin knew how to create the desired effects in his own compositions quite naturally, but other performers had to learn new approaches when dealing with his music, and this took time. This might go towards explaining why Skryabin's own performances were always more successful than any of his contemporaries. The handful of other pianists, Hofmann and Rachmaninov amongst them, who did use his music in recitals were not always successful, according to his critics and followers, in evoking that other worldliness or ethereal atmosphere so necessary in any performance of his music.

When Skryabin died, Rachmaninov gave a series of recitals in memory of his friend but by all accounts Skryabin's friends were outraged at the presentation of his music. Prokofiev, who was present at one of the recitals (Nov.18th 1915) in which Rachmaninov played the fifth sonata, later noted that Skryabin's performances were immediately attractive and enticing with subtle shades of colour and rhythms which made the music fly and soar, whereas "with Rachmaninov all its notes stood firmly and clearly on the ground". Rachmaninov's playing was that of a nineteenth century virtuoso whose performances were always controlled and refined, technically brilliant with a good sense of form. In the Russian Music Gazette, Grigori Prokofiev wrote - "the audience was generous in its

appreciation, though it distinctly sensed that something was wrong. Rachmaninov played with his usual technical perfection and the musical quality natural to him, but in his approach to Skryabin's works, he did not (or did not wish to) grasp the basic nature of this music - the unprecedented emotional saturation of Skryabin's creative power ..... As if seeking a logic in Skryabin's harmonic structure, Rachmaninov artificially condensed the tempi. This showed the harmonic line with extraordinary clarity, but the vital spirit had gone! ..... You should have seen the disappointment with which the admirers of Skryabin's later piano works looked at each other as they heard the innocuous and prosaic interpretation of the Satanic Poem, or the academically chilled treatment of the Second and Fifth Sonatas".

Hofmann's style too, was not entirely suited to Skryabin's music in that he was restrained from reading between the lines by his perfectionist approach, meticulously observing the printed page. Clearly, Skryabin had a new approach to pianism which was recognised by his teacher Safanov, as early as 1888 when he remarked that, "Skryabin possessed in the highest degree what I always impressed on my students: the less like itself a piano is under the fingers of a player, the better it is".

Many recognised and appreciated this new approach to the piano including Eaglefield Hull, who heard Skryabin perform at the Bechstein Hall in London in 1914. He wrote - "Everyone was struck by what appeared to be almost a new kind of pianism. His playing was so easy, so refined, quiet and unassuming, yet so beautifully ethereal in the softest passages, so rich and organ like in the mezzo parts, yet so satisfying in the fortissimi, and his pedal effects were quite magical in effect. It appeared as though this new music had brought along with it a new kind of playing". And so it did, because concertgoers had to review their understanding of piano music and pianism. No longer could one approach Skryabin's music as they might Chopin or Liszt's. New pedal effects were directly involved in producing new tone and colours, and there was little evidence to suggest that

technical brilliance was exploited for its own sake.

As a presenter of his own works, sheer technical brilliance had no great attraction for Skryabin and he always regarded the creative side of his art as being more important than performance. That is not to say however, that he didn't see the significance of performance. He knew that his reputation as a composer was dependant upon self advertisement and only through performance could he realise a following for his music and its objectives.

As one might expect, in his student days Skryabin was indeed interested in virtuosity and became a little jealous of Josef Lhevinne's miraculous technique. Lhevinne was a fellow student at the Moscow Conservatoire and it was Skryabin's wish to outshine him by playing Balakirev's *Islamey* and Liszt's *Don Juan Fantasia* more brilliantly. He over practised and badly injured his right hand. He couldn't use it at all for a while and this gave rise to his *Two Pieces Op.9* for left hand alone, which he often used in recitals much later in his career but he was indeed lucky not to have had his concert career cut disastrously short by this reckless action. Whilst being unable to use his right hand, he developed the technique of the left, which many writers have assumed accounts for the difficult left hand parts in his compositions for the piano.

Skryabin was never allowed to forget his folly as all through his concert career his right hand remained weaker than his left, and this often worried him. However, his wish to play the *Don Juan Fantasia* brilliantly was granted when he presented it in his final examination recital winning a gold medal. But soon after, at the outset of his concert career, Skryabin was still very much concerned about the weakness of his right hand as Julius Engel described in his biographical sketch of Skryabin published in *Musical Contemporary*, 1916 - "In 1893 he wore on both arms red woollen oversleeves, obviously homemade and very conspicuous. When playing in public, before he began, he would point to his right hand as if asking for



indulgence". Never again, in the whole of his career, did he overpractise. Often an hour or an hour and a half a day would suffice when concert dates were approaching.

Much later in his career Skryabin himself did admit to one other weakness. He told G.E. Conus that if he had to be examined in sight reading, "I should come a cropper over a Kuhlau Sonatine". Skryabin never considered himself a good sight reader but this was no handicap for a concert pianist. His general musicianship seems to have been more than adequate, although he had no time for academic exercises. He always wanted to apply his musicianship to the development of his own art, much to the annoyance of some of his professors at the conservatoire. He would often give demonstrations of new orchestral works from the full score manuscript and positively revelled in improvisation at the piano. Like all concert pianists he had a good ear and an excellent memory, and he appears to have been a child prodigy too, as at the age of six he was able to play a piece he had heard for the first time, and at eight gave a rendering of a Bach Gavotte and of Mendelssohn's Gondolier's Song, without music, after only one hearing.

So what was it then, that really held his audiences? For some it was his philosophical ideas, for others it was fashionable, but for many it was a number of things, not least of all his music because he had many followers who identified with and understood his music. They understood all that was new in his striving. They recognised that Skryabin, unlike other concert pianists, was not interpreting the printed notes, but recreating his music as he played. In this way the listener was involved directly in the creation of the new music.

Although Skryabin's beginnings were Chopinesque, he soon developed a highly individual style in his compositions, and as Alfred Swan remarked, it was not so much his words and philosophical ideas but "the exquisite sounds and harmonies, the incantational rhythms and magic

formulae that he extracted from the piano", that held his audiences. Swan went on to describe recitals which he attended in St.Petersburg, given in Skryabin's last years when his reputation as a concert pianist and composer had been secured. "The spell was real", he said, "and when the concert was ended no one thought of leaving. With a mighty wave, the audience would rise from their seats and rush towards the platform screaming, applauding, hurling at the triumphant composer, names of pieces that they wanted to be repeated or played over and above the programme. A second concert then began, often lasting half as long as the first and not until the composer was utterly exhausted would he be allowed to retire".

As a teacher, Skryabin insisted to his pupils that the first quality to be sought for in performance was intoxication, and as a performer he constantly strived for, and for the most part, successfully achieved his aim. Skryabin's success was gained with "a technique of nerves"(to use his own words) and on the platform at least, a charismatic personality. Maria Nemenova-Lunz (1879-1934), one of Skryabin's pupils, said that "when he sat at the piano his whole body, his hand gestures and movements of the head, so characteristic of him, seemed to translate the mood and meaning of the music into action". It was his platform personality and performance then, which attracted and held his audience perhaps. His physical appearance had little to do with the attraction. He was not very imposing, rather small and in the words of Sabaneyev, "insignificant in appearance and unnoticeable in a crowd". In 1909 Sabaneyev was to describe him further saying that, "he had an insignificant little beard and a fluffy, surprisingly dashing moustache, a sort of survival of his 'officerism'. His physiognomy was nervous, livid; he gazed absentmindedly upward; he had brown eyes, small but with wide open lids, with a sort of intoxication in his glance. There was something of a wild animal in his eyes, not a beast of prey, but some little creature such as a marmot. He was affable and exquisitely polite - but in his politeness there was an awful distance from all these people who surrounded him with friendly effusiveness".



In summing up then, there seems to be plenty of evidence to suggest that Skryabin was indeed a pianist of some calibre. He captured the imagination of his followers and held his audiences. His recitals were events not to be missed. They caused excitement in the musical world and he was hailed as a star, not only by the public but by fellow musicians, some of whom were of an older generation. He possessed all the basic qualities of a concert pianist. His memory and technique were excellent. He learned things quickly, had a very good sense of pitch and his pedal effects were outstanding. Safanov, his piano professor, said of his pedal technique, "He made the instrument breathe". When Skryabin was playing he told his class, "Don't look at his hands; look at his feet".

We know that he had small hands and that his right hand troubled him from time to time but this appears to have been nothing too serious as he never had to cancel a performance because of it. What he lacked in his right hand he seems to have more than made up for in the technique of his left. His phrasing was subtle and precise, and in the words of his pupil, Maria Nemenova-Lunz, "he worried more than anything else about sound. 'You must caress the keyboard. Don't pound it as if you hate it', he would say. He worked indefatigably on tonal shadings. He made us repeat a note forever. He helped us to find ways of striking it to get separate colours. He kept us interested in the sound and life of the instrument. How valuable for technique!"

The only two areas of his technique where there remains any doubt in the minds of a number of people, are his tone quality and rhythm. In 1906, the critic of the New York Herald was complaining of his "small tone" and Richard Aldrich in the New York Times wrote of his lack of "any considerable command of richness in depth of tone". However, the number of critics mentioning this is small in comparison to the number who do not and Skryabin's pupil Nemenova-Lunz offers further insight into this aspect of Skryabin's approach to the piano when she wrote of his interest in sound production as already mentioned, and in admitting, "It is true

that he did not have a frightening fortissimo. He did not much like 'materialistic sonority'. He always said that the deepest forte must always sound soft". It is clear that Skryabin did not seek the brilliant and crashing Lisztian fortissimo of the nineteenth century tradition but a more rich and rounded organ-like quality which would help his music to soar as he intended.

As far as the allegation of playing everything with an unsteady rhythm is concerned, it is difficult to establish the truth of the matter, but again, his pupil Maria Nemenova-Lunz states that, "He wouldn't accept music without rhythm. He made us think out every formal passage by likening it to speech or talking". Also, in 1914, the London Times praised his "effortless energy of rhythm" and the following year a Moscow critic wrote, "He breaks the chains of strict rhythm and makes the rhythm sound anew every time he plays, filling his performances with freshness".

As with his approach to sound production, Skryabin had a new approach to rhythm. He probably played quite freely but as noted earlier, a good performance of his music depends so much on rhythm to attain that energy and subtle dance-like quality which is so much his very own. Strict adherence to time signatures in his music produces a performance without any true Skryabin spirit. The magic has disappeared, and this may point to one of the reasons why his followers were so aghast at the performances given by Rachmaninov and others in the early part of this century.

## PIANISTIC STYLE

It is undoubtedly the harmonic content of Skryabin's music which leads us to readily identify his individuality. The colours and textures of his later works were developed over the last ten to fifteen years of his life and study of his piano music reveals that his real style is evident right from those early pieces which many writers have been quick to disregard and point out influences of Chopin, Liszt and Wagner. It is from the chromaticism of these composers however, that Skryabin developed his own language, bridging the gap between tonality and atonality. In Skryabin's fully developed musical personality themes grow from harmonies, harmonies grow from themes; rhythms grow from themes and themes grow from rhythms. All elements grow from one another and all are created equal, supporting and enhancing each other, but it is usually the harmony in a Skryabin piece that is the basis for the whole content.

Although there are few pedal markings to be found in his piano music, successful performances depend very much on skilled pedalling. This holds true for his entire catalogue of piano works wherein the pedal becomes an integral part of his style, blending, enriching and sustaining movement of the overall harmonic content of a piece. The pedal is important too for the wide melodic leaps of the left hand in pieces where the bass notes must be sustained and built into rich chords to support not only the melody but the whole structure of a piece. This is also the case when Skryabin uses wide ranging bass figures as a kind of ostinato providing a constant flow.

There are smaller works where Skryabin uses evenly spaced chords

placed mainly in the centre of the keyboard, making for little technical difficulty, but the larger works contain wide leaps, especially in the left hand parts, making them far more difficult for the pianist. Whatever spaces there are within these leaps are filled with tonal or contrapuntal activity, and to maintain the flow, once again the pedal comes into use.

Broken chords extending the span of the hand are found regularly in Skryabin's music but they are not always notated as such. They are sometimes written as a collection of grace notes and operate on a rhythmic or melodic level in later works, or as a collection of bass notes to be caught by the pedal to produce a sustained harmony.

Hymn-like chords within the span of the hand do not find a place in his later pieces but various other uses of chords can be found throughout his whole output. Chords with staccato marks encompassed by phrase marks for example, often with the sustaining pedal in use, indicate a certain tone quality produced by touch rather than shortened notes and repeated chords are used to produce rhythmic excitement and sustained sonorities. Skryabin often uses the latter characteristic to pile up sound on sound in order to reach large climaxes, and in the sonatas such excitement is further enhanced by the use of polyrhythms. At such climaxes octaves usually supply melodic reinforcement, although in the later works Skryabin rarely finds a use for this device.

Although Skryabin uses arpeggio figures in one form or another throughout his whole output to create richness of tone and nervous energy, it is his use of trills and tremolos which take on more importance in this connection as his style evolves. Trills not only assist in producing nervous energy but they become melodic elements of much importance, creating a forward movement in an otherwise harmonically static section of music.

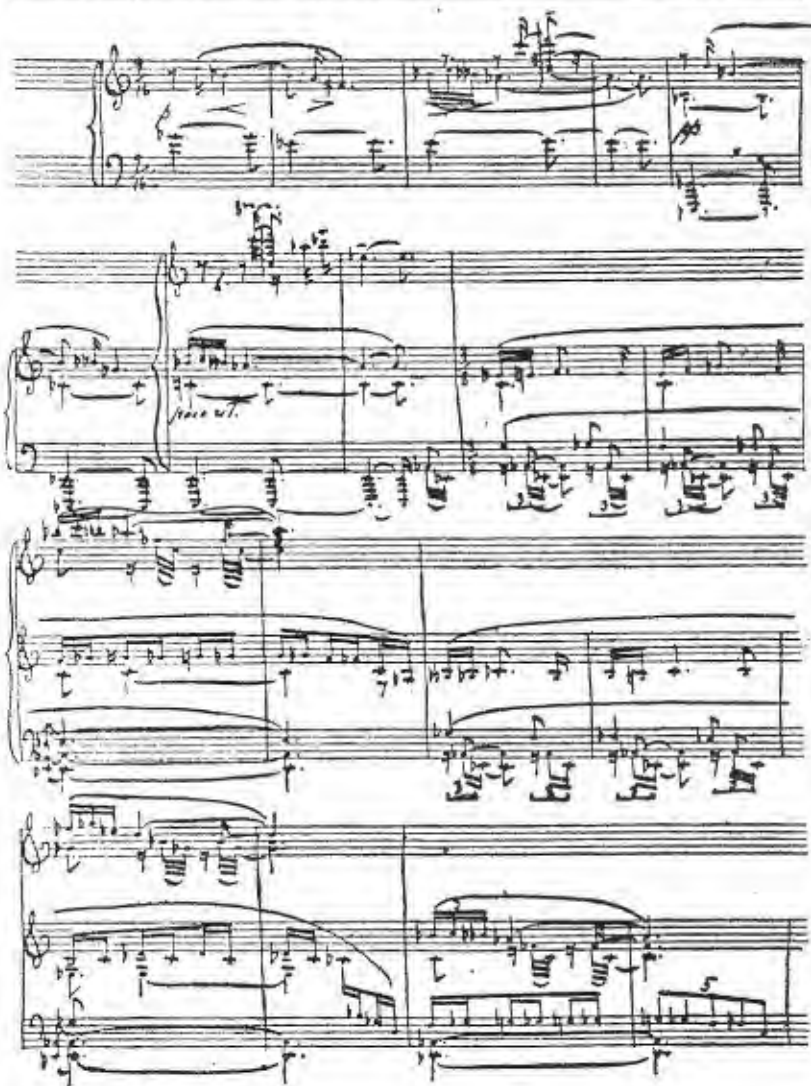
Tremolos found in his later works are used in close relationship to the trill. They are used as an accompaniment figure or as part of the

melodic line and interplay between tremolos in different voices produces a rhythmic drive and excitement so essential to his music. The quivering and shimmering effect produced in this way is one of Skryabin's most personal hallmarks.

Skryabin's understanding of harmony and modulation is first class and use of counterpoint although not usually imitative, secures a good structure to his pieces. Two and four part writing can be found in the earlier works but in his later pieces he is able to keep things moving through the use of inner voices and a kind of decoration woven around a slow moving harmonic structure. Although Skryabin's counterpoint is not at first quite so obvious as that of earlier masters, he nevertheless managed to develop logical movement as an important aspect of his later style.

Another element of Skryabin's music which creates movement within a slowly changing harmonic framework is his use of polyrhythms. All through his works the use of two notes against three, three against four and three against five can be found. This produces a subtly personal rhythm, often disregarding bar lines or beats within a bar, and combined with his constant attention to harmonies and melodies based on the interval of a fourth, he arrived at a perfect unity of expression.

# Sonate N° 10



## THE TEN SONATAS

The Sonatas form a historical picture of Skryabin's career as the composition of these works spans his whole creative output. The first sonata was written when Skryabin was a very young man and the last three date from his final two years of life. Right from the start, Skryabin shows his craftsmanship and mastery of techniques gained from his teachers, only to be expanded upon in the second sonata of radically altered form. The third takes stock of what has gone before and at the same time looks forward to the fourth with its newly found freedom of thought and philosophic expression. The fifth sonata begins the transition of Skryabin's harmonic style towards the atonality encountered in the sixth and seventh sonatas, where mysticism also becomes an important aspect of his general style. The eighth continues in similar vein but the last two sonatas show a turn towards simplification of technique and a more ecstatic expression.

Skryabin doesn't use the title 'Sonata' for his later works in any classical sense, indicating a fixed form, as all the sonatas from the sixth onwards are single movement works. Although first movement sonata form is apparent even in these single movement works, only the first and third sonatas are in four movements. The sonatas are mostly short in length but each contains a wide variety of ideas which instead of developing in the classical sense, gradually change, intertwine and become one another, rather like a web of Wagnerian motives. There is a prologue of thematic and harmonic importance in these works and a complicated development in which the subject material recurs at various points in the musical argument. There is always a fusion of ideas culminating in a huge climax of fulfilment and it is Skryabin's extra-musical ideas which help govern the



interplay and contrast of his motives.

Written fairly quickly in the summer of 1892, the First Sonata Op.6 is a well balanced work with themes derived from simple motives and shows traces of the composer's later individuality. However, the work is rather pessimistic in that it ends with a funeral march in which Skryabin presents his own despair as at the time of writing he thought that his career as a piano virtuoso was over, due to a right hand injury sustained in overpractising. The First Sonata is he said, "a cry against Fate, against God", for having inflicted on him his terrible injury.

The fiery opening of the first movement is of great importance thematically speaking, as the first three ascending notes in the bass provide material for and link all four movements of the work. The slow movement is something of an elegy, again reflecting the composer's despair and the third movement, resembling the first in mood, passes to the finale and funeral march without a break.

The Second Sonata Op.19 (Fantasy Sonata) was first performed by the composer in Paris in 1896 before the manuscript was completed the following year and consists of two contrasting movements. The work shows expressive power, unity and much invention making great advances on the First Sonata and earlier influences of Chopin are seen to be disappearing fast. Skryabin performed the work frequently and according to his programme the two movements represent contrasting moods of the sea. The first is concerned with the poetical beauty of the quiet seashore at night with the development section hinting at the dark brooding depths of the ocean, whilst the second movement creates the feeling of strength and power associated with the vast expanse of a stormy sea.

Completed in 1898 the Third Sonata Op.23 is in four movement form. Skryabin himself entitled the sonata "Soul States" and a programme, written by Tatiana Schloezer and authorised by the composer, was printed



for his recitals in Brussels in November 1906. From this we deduce that the philosophic expression of later works was already in his mind:

### ***Soul States***

1. *The Soul, wild and free, hurls itself passionately into pain and strife.*
2. *The Soul has found a kind of rest, momentary and fictitious; weary of suffering, it desires to forget, it would even sing and blossom..... but the léger rhythm, the perfumed harmonies are only a veil, through which one perceives the bruised and anxious Soul.*
3. *The Soul drifts across a sea of tender and melancholy sentiments: love, sadness, vague desires, indefinite thoughts, whose charm is frail as a spectre .....*
4. *In the tempest of the unchained elements, the Soul, intoxicated, strives and wrestles. From the depths of its being arises the formidable voice of the man-God, whose song of victory resounds triumphantly. But, too feeble yet, within reach of the summit, it falls, crushed, into the abyss of nothingness.*

The lovely third movement provides the transformed theme of the grand climax in the energetic finale and one realises that Skryabin's musical language is becoming far more individual and organised. From this point on he used the idea of transforming initial subject themes to provide codas of great power in all his future sonatas.

It is the Fourth Sonata Op.30 which proclaims Skryabin's development of a new sound-world, expressing his own search for ecstasy, the chief musical feature of which is increased harmonic and melodic chromaticism. The contraction and integration of movements shown in

this work along with a return of the opening melodic material transformed at the end, sets the form for all the sonatas to follow. Although being presented as a work in two movements, the first being very short, one should regard this sonata as being in one movement with a short prologue. It is the dreamlike prologue which states the leading motives of aspiration and languor and after much activity and struggle in the movement proper, it is the aspiration theme of the prologue which is transformed into one of radiant triumph in the coda.

Written in 1903, the Fourth Sonata was favoured by Skryabin who wrote a short poem to go with it soon after it was composed:

*In a light mist, transparent vapour  
Lost afar and yet distinct  
A star gleams softly  
How beautiful!  
The bluish mystery  
Of her glow  
Beckons me, cradles me.*

In the Fifth Sonata Op.53 Skryabin's melodic expression matches his handling of the harmonic content and there is a great sense of unity and symmetry in the structure of its single movement. As in the the Fourth Sonata, Skryabin presents his most important thematic material right at the beginning in the dreamy and languorous prologue, only to reappear completely transformed in the coda's huge and ecstatic climax.

This sonata takes Skryabin's chromaticism to the limit and points towards the atonality of his last works. Although there is a key signature, the music operates around tonal centres rather than key patterns and within its single movement its form is cast on classical lines. Its long and

truly remarkable development section places it as one of the composer's key works.

Written within a few days at Lausanne in 1908, the Fifth Sonata is strongly related in mood and thought to the composer's orchestral work, *The Poem of Ecstasy*, and a few lines from his literary poem of the same title head the score:

*I call you to life, O mysterious forces!  
Submerged in depths obscure  
Of the Creator-Spirit, timid embryos of life  
To you I now bring courage.*

The last five sonatas were all written within the years 1911-13. Each work is highly individual in character and together they sum up Skryabin's piano style and philosophic expression. Skryabin himself described the Sixth Sonata Op.62 as frightening, dark and dangerous and he never once played it in public. It is a difficult work because of its mood changes but it is also a wonderful sound-world of new textures and harmonies. Beauty, purity and strength mingle with terror, fear and mystery. All joy is suppressed in this dark music and everything is transitory.

In one movement with no key signature, the Sixth Sonata represents Skryabin's fully developed individual pianistic style where both harmony and melody are derived from the same set of notes which the composer entitled his "mystic chord". Although sounding very free, its structure is tight and orderly, approximating first movement sonata form.

Written at the same time as the Sixth in 1911, the Seventh Sonata Op.64 was one of Skryabin's favourites. He entitled it "White Mass", and in many respects it is the antithesis of its predecessor. It characterises flight, joy and ecstasy as opposed to those darker forces of the Sixth Sonata and it

has its own form of the "mystic chord" to provide its sound-world which introduces itself to us with similar, mysterious bell-like overtones that opened the Sixth Sonata.

It is clear that this work is closely related in thought and outline to the composer's projected *Mystery* and in speaking of it to Sabaniev, Skryabin commented that, "here is the last dance before the act itself, before the instant of dematerialisation". The Seventh Sonata, with its complex rhythms and intricate counterpoint, is one of the most technically demanding of all Skryabin sonatas.

The Eighth Sonata Op.66 is timeless and reflective in mood and characterises the domain of the mystic. It is spacious and takes time to recapitulate. Although in one movement, it is somewhat longer than the other late sonatas and it differs from them in that there is no huge climax or aggression. Skryabin never performed this work in public but he described it as, "life invisible and life unseen".

The course of the work follows Skryabin's now usual plan of presenting significant material in a prologue followed by a much agitated movement proper, in which there is a huge development section and a dazzling coda. The main themes of the sonata are clearly defined and the work ends in perfect tranquility using harmonies from the opening passages.

The Ninth Sonata Op.68 continues the idea used by its predecessor of ending the work in the same mood as it begins but its form is much less restrictive and free. In this sonata Skryabin shows himself to be masterly in maintaining tension and combining thematic material. When he played the Ninth Sonata, Skryabin said that he was "practising sorcery", but its subtitle, "Black Mass", was not given by the composer himself although it is clear that his thoughts are turned towards the effects of evil on mankind and mankind's modification of it.

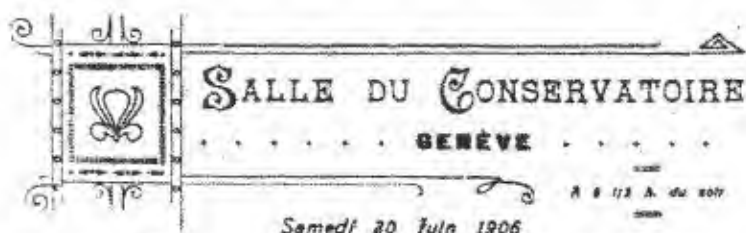
The beautiful and legendary atmosphere of the opening is presented through real economy of means but the thematic and the harmonic material used to create this atmosphere undergoes, in the course of the work, a massive transformation as if being acted upon by 'dark forces', almost culminating in horror. The sonata closes with a glimpse of the beauty which finds its origin in the legendary atmosphere of the opening.

Skryabin played his tenth and last sonata for the first time in Moscow, December 1913 and gave another performance in Petrograd in February the following year just before his death. He referred to the Tenth Sonata Op.70 as a "sonata of insects". "Insects are born of the sun, they are the sun's kisses," he said.

The work opens in a veiled atmosphere reminiscent of the ninth sonata and again Skryabin uses the material presented in the prologue to build the whole structure of the work. The Allegro presents a joyous aspect which alternates with more tender passages. Here too, new themes are combined with the prologue material leading to much development during which the thematic material is condensed rather than expanded and ultimately a blazing climax of exaltation is reached. However, the coda, which returns us for a moment to the veiled atmosphere of the opening, seems to offer questions rather than conclusions.

A notable feature of the work is Skryabin's structural use of trills which move us along breathlessly. It is a joyful and radiant work with intricate counterpoints and wild dances of rhythmic complexity.

Although maintaining close links with sonata form, the last five sonatas show a certain development of form and natural progression of style and we find that Skryabin had arrived at a wholly satisfying structure in which he was able to cast most successfully, his mystical and musical ideas. The ten sonatas represent a most remarkable achievement, unrivalled by any of Skryabin's contemporaries, and they stand as works of great significance in piano literature.



A 8 1/2 A. du soir

# CONCERT

DONNÉ PAR M.

## Scriabine

POUR L'AUDITION DE SES ŒUVRES

### PROGRAMME

#### PREMIÈRE PARTIE

Allegro de Concert en si bémol mineur (Op. 18)  
Nocturne en ré bémol majeur, pour la main gauche seule (Op. 9 n° 1)  
Six Préludes  
Trois Mazurkas

#### DEUXIÈME PARTIE

Sonate n° 3 en fa dièse mineur (Op. 23)  
A Allegro drammatico — B Allegretto  
C Andante — D Presto  
Deux Poèmes (Op. 32)  
Trois Études (Op. 8, 2)  
Valse en la bémol majeur.

Plan du concert ERARD aux soins de la maison Ch. BERGER

### PRIX DES PLACES

FAUTEUIL DE PARQUET, 8 FR. — PARQUET, 3 FR.  
PANTERRE, 2 FR. — GALERIE, 2 FR.

Billets à l'entrée : Magasin de musique BERG, boulevard du Théâtre, 8.  
ROTSCH, Corretoria, 12 et chez le concierge du Conservatoire.

BILLETS À L'ENTRÉE DU CONCERT

Ouverture des Portes à 8 heures

## **BRIEF NOTES ON THE PIANO MUSIC**

### **Opus 1. Valse in F minor**

A student work showing the beginnings of the Promethean chord in the harmonic clashes of bars 26 and 58. Pub. Jurgenson, 1893.

### **Opus 2. Three Pieces**

All three pieces show the influence of Chopin. Skryabin's harmonic language of the later works is hinted at in the first (Etude) and third (Impromptu à la Mazur) pieces. Note particularly the harmonies at bars 25 and 45 in the latter. Pub. Jurgenson, 1893.

### **Opus 3. Ten Mazurkas**

Ten distinguished little dance pieces showing the influence of Chopin and Schumann. The published version of No.2 differs from the original manuscript and it is clear in No.8 that here Skryabin was looking for a more original mode of expression. Pub. Jurgenson, 1893.

### **Opus 4. Allegro Appassionata**

A good piece for the concert repertoire showing the influence of Liszt. An early attempt at sonata form. Intended to be the opening movement of a sonata begun in 1887. Pub. Belaieff, 1894.

### **Opus 5. Two Nocturnes**

Two pieces of much charm and poetry. Note the original harmonies at bar 56 in No.1, and bar 25 in No.2. Pub. Jurgenson, 1893.

### **Opus 6. Sonata No.1 in F minor**

Opens with a brilliant Allegro, the second theme of which shows much originality. A very expressive Andante is followed by a whirl wind Presto interrupted by a Funeral March and hymn-like section. Pub. Belaieff, 1895.

### **Opus 7. Two Impromptus a la Mazur**

Still very much influenced by Chopin but the second piece shows a more original approach to harmonic and rhythmic treatment, eg. sets of four notes in the bass being played against sets of six notes in the treble. Pub. Jurgenson, 1893.

### **Opus 8. Twelve Etudes**

A very fine set of studies demanding considerable pianistic technique. A more restless or aggressive style is in evidence here. A great variety of mood. Nos.11 and 12 are thematically related to the First Sonata and No.10 shows some harmonic searching. Nos.2, 9 and 12 were favoured by Skryabin. Pub. Belaieff, 1895.

### **Opus 9. Prelude and Nocturne for Left Hand**

Two highly finished pieces which many players are quite willing to perform with both hands. The rhapsodical nature of the Nocturne with its 'melismae' and 'fioritura' passages shows the influence of Liszt. Pub. Belaieff, 1895.

### **Opus 10. Two Impromptus**

The first has a hymn-like second subject and middle section possessing much lyrical charm. Pub. Belaieff, 1895.

### **Opus 11. Twenty-four Preludes**

Written at various times these 24 pieces progress through the circle of 24 keys. Although Chopin, Liszt and Schumann are still evident here these pieces are much more individual and of great interest to



pianists because of the diversity in mood, colour, character and technique. Nos. 1, 3, 6 and 9 exhibit much originality, 6 and 14 show a much more aggressive approach, 20 is somehow related to Op.8 No.12 and in the final Prelude alternating rhythms of 6-8 and 5-8 are used to good effect. Pub. Belaieff, 1897.

### **Opus 12. Two Impromptus**

The first piece is rather like a study marked Presto. The poetry of the second piece off-sets the first admirably and its coda looks forward to the Fantasia Op.28. Pub. Belaieff, 1897.

### **Opus 13. Six Preludes**

These six pieces compliment each other well. No.1 is beautiful with a totally calm nature and is related in character to No.3. The second piece is more serious, No.4 more strenuous, whilst the final number shows open defiance. Pub. Belaieff, 1897.

### **Opus 14. Two Impromptus**

Two refined pieces, the second having one of Skryabin's hymn-like melodies. Pub. Belaieff, 1897.

### **Opus 15. Five Preludes**

The first is still Chopinesque but quite rhythmical. The second and third pieces require great stretches in both hands and in No.4 the important left hand part is mirrored in the higher register. Pub. Belaieff, 1897.

### **Opus 16. Five Preludes**

The extended arpeggios in the left hand part of No.1 require great care and reveal a hallmark of Skryabin. In No.2 the interest lies in the harmonic content whilst No.3 looks back to Op.11 No.15. The fourth piece is a mere twelve bars in length with a simple three bar theme; a most attractive little gem and No.5 shows the same precision of form. Pub. Belaieff, 1897.

### **Opus 17. Seven Preludes**

Technically more advanced than any previous set. Skryabin's style and originality take a step forward. This is obvious in Nos. 1, 3 and 4. Nos. 2 and 5 make good studies in octaves. Pub. Belaieff, 1897.

### **Opus 18. Concert Allegro in B flat minor**

A good concert piece with a beautiful second subject. Very demanding. Octave passages remind one of Liszt but Skryabin's harmonic ideas are moving forward. Pub. Belaieff, 1897.

### **Opus 19. Sonata No.2 (Sonata-Fantasia) in G sharp minor**

Said to have been inspired by the sea and written at Genoa and the Crimea between 1892 and 1897. It shows Skryabin's individuality as never before. Melodic invention is notable. There is a very expressive andante and another whirlwind presto containing a beautiful song-like theme. Pub. Belaieff, 1898.

### **Opus 21. Polonaise in B flat minor**

Skryabin's only piece in this form. Not a very outstanding piece. The middle section looks back to earlier works, Pub. Belaieff, 1898.

### **Opus 22. Four Preludes**

Here Skryabin is looking forward to the later works especially in the first two pieces. No.3 is both delicate and charming. Pub. Belaieff, 1898.

### **Opus 23. Sonata No.3 in F sharp minor**

In four movement form and written in 1897. Follows a programme of "Soul States" circulated on the occasion of Skryabin's Brussels recital. Here Skryabin leaves behind him the style of his earlier works and proclaims a new individuality. Pub. Belaieff, 1898.

### **Opus 25. Nine Mazurkas**

Written during the first year as Professor at the Moscow Conservatoire. No.2 recalls the third sonata and No.9 is perhaps the most interesting harmonically. These pieces show Skryabin's continued interest in the dance element which was to feature in later works but in altogether different guise. Pub. Belaieff, 1899.

### **Opus 27. Two Preludes**

The grief stricken first piece shows original use of the French-sixth chord whilst the second is more daring in harmony and recalls Op.11 No.15. Pub. Belaieff, 1901.

### **Opus 28. Fantasia in B minor**

A very fine extended piece rich in thematic material. Good development. Influence of Liszt is still apparent and the triplet with dotted middle note is more noticeable in the melodic line. Pub. Belaieff, 1901.

### **Opus 30. Sonata No.4 in F sharp major**

Written in 1903, this sonata hails the coming of the Poem of Ecstasy. The harmonies of the orchestral work are used for the first time in this piece and the movements are played without a break. The climax comes in the coda and this becomes a feature of later works. Pub. Belaieff, 1907.

### **Opus 31. Four Preludes**

Evidence of both early and later styles in this set. No.1 is harmonically linked to the third symphony. No.2 is fierce and aggressive and No.3 is more like a short study in quintuplets. The last piece is a perfect little statement in its own right. Although No.1 is marked Andante it is metronomed at 50 to the crotchet. Pub. Belaieff, 1904.

### **Opus 32. Two Poems**

Popular with pianists, the first piece is in binary form. The second subject marked 'in crescendo' is highly characteristic and both subjects of this piece are admirably developed. The second piece is another step forward to the language of Prometheus, especially rich in harmonic content. Pub. Belaieff, 1904.

### **Opus 33. Four Preludes**

A well balanced set of pieces. From the serenity of the first, vague contemplation using unresolved dissonances follows in the second only to be interrupted by the stormy third. No.4 is a short study. Pub. Belaieff, 1904.

### **Opus 34. Tragic Poem**

Generally influenced by Liszt but here Skryabin is still working on the development of a new musical expression. Makes much use of chords with sharpened fifths and ninths. Pub. Belaieff, 1904.

### **Opus 35. Three Preludes**

No real advancement in originality in these three pieces but pleasing to play. Pub. Belaieff, 1904.

### **Opus 36. Satanic Poem**

The idea of the piece is related to the "Soul States" programme of the third sonata. Here Skryabin is concerned with the evil or contaminating elements which oppose the soul in the journey of its evolution. Thematically and to some extent harmonically related to the Poem of Ecstasy. Pub. Belaieff, 1904.

### **Opus 37. Four Preludes**

The left hand part in No.1 is typical of Skryabin. Harmonically advanced. No.3. has the 'mystic chord' at the opening and is

meditative in mood whilst No.4 is an angry outburst recalling the Sonata Op.6 (first theme) and concluding with a very original touch in the penultimate bar. Pub. Belaieff, 1904.

### **Opus 38. Valse**

Recalls earlier pieces and for a time was a favourite with Skryabin. The right hand weaves many different rhythmic patterns and decorations over a regular left hand beat. Pub. Belaieff, 1904.

### **Opus 39. Four Preludes**

This set shows Skryabin's individuality firmly established. Note the harmonic experimentation in No.2. The final piece with its strong chords is entirely Skryabin. Pub. Belaieff, 1904.

### **Opus 40. Two Mazurkas**

Two of Skryabin's most refined and charming dance pieces showing an individuality never seen before in this form. No.1 looks forward to *Caresse Dansée* Op.57. Pub. Belaieff, 1904.

### **Opus 41. Poem in D flat**

The beautiful melody of this piece has an intricate and typical accompaniment. Not a very demanding work. Pub. Belaieff, 1904.

### **Opus 42. Eight Studies**

With the possible exception of Nos.4 and 5, this is an excellent set of studies in rhythm: the first, nine against five, the second, three against five, the third in triplets (*prestissimo*), the sixth, five against three, the seventh, three against four and the last, five against three. No.5 is perhaps the most popular of the set and No.6 is built entirely upon the opening harmonies which was to become a feature in the later works. Pub. Belaieff, 1904.

#### **Opus 44. Two Poems**

Two very contrasting pieces. In the first a lone voice sings out above a gentle accompaniment whilst in the second a much warmer tone is produced. Pub. Belaieff, 1905.

#### **Opus 45. Three Pieces**

An excellent set of pieces. Album Leaf (No.1) is typical of the period and meditative in mood. Poeme Fantastique (No.2) looks forward to later works in its harmony and there is a very satisfying Prelude to end the set. Pub. Belaieff, 1905.

#### **Opus 46. Scherzo**

A short presto piece in which Skryabin appears to be on the brink of a breakthrough into a completely new harmonic language. Pub. Belaieff, 1905.

#### **Opus 47. Quasi Valse**

Here Skryabin brings his new harmonic ideas to bear on an old dance form and is quite successful in evading particular tonality. Note bar 6 where the music hovers between D minor and D flat major. Pub. Belaieff, 1905.

#### **Opus 48. Four Preludes**

A very satisfactory set. The first piece is a boisterous allegro, the second is contemplative in mood and only eight bars in length, whilst the third is a restless capriccioso. The final piece is festive, radiant and triumphant. Pub. Belaieff, 1906.

#### **Opus 49. Three Pieces**

Beginning with the short Etude this set continues with a very aggressive little Prelude and ends with the peace and calm of the Reverie. Pub. Belaieff, 1906.

### **Opus 51. Four Pieces**

Skryabin begins to use more descriptive titles. *Fagilité* (No.1), has a beautiful melody in the tenor register accompanied by languid chords in the treble and triplet arpeggios in the bass. The *Prelude in A minor* (No.2) is lugubrious, the *Winged Poem* (No.3), expressive using subtle speed changes and the *Danse languide* (No.4) very characteristic in mood and style. All pieces are short and concise which was to become a feature of later works. Pub. Belaieff, 1907.

### **Opus 52. Three Pieces**

The *Poem* (No.1) shows clarity of form and is based wholly on a new found harmony, whilst the flight figuration of *Enigma* (No.2) is allied to the *Poem of Ecstasy* as is the final piece, *Poeme languide*. Pub. Russian Music Publishing Co., 1911.

### **Opus 53. Sonata No.5**

In one movement as all following sonatas. Written at Lausanne in 1908 and based on a quotation from the literary *Poem of Ecstasy*. This is a foretaste of *Prometheus* both in harmonic content and design. Pub. Russian Music Publishing Co., 1913.

### **Opus 56. Four Pieces**

A savage and powerful *Prelude* opens the set followed by an ironic scherzo (*Ironies*). *Nuances* (No.3) is soft and tender and the set closes with a dance-like *Etude*. The second piece is longer than the others. Pub. Belaieff, 1908.

### **Opus 57. Two Pieces**

In the first short piece (*Desir*), Skryabin demonstrates some wonderful possibilities for his new harmonic language and the second (*Caresse Dansée*) is the ultimate in the composer's dance forms. These are two of Skryabin's best short piano pieces. Pub. Belaieff, 1908.

**Opus 58. Album Leaf**

With key signature now abandoned this piece is linked psychologically to Prometheus. First appeared in a Russian Composer's Album alongside pieces by Rachmaninov and Taneiev. Pub. Russian Music Publishing Co.,1911.

**Opus 59. Two Pieces**

The Poeme (No.1) is a graceful allegretto but its sweetness is soon dispelled by the savage and war-like Prelude. It is typical of Skryabin's defiant outbursts but is the only one of its kind to be marked 'sauvage' by the composer. Pub. Russian Music Publishing Co.,1913.

**Opus 61. Poeme-Nocturne**

A complex and extended piece looking far beyond Prometheus. Not only does Skryabin continue without key signatures but this piece exhibits atonality. Pub. Russian Music Publishing Co.,1913.

**Opus 62. Sonata No.6**

First of the Sonatas without a key signature but maintains the single movement form. Skryabin experiments with the bell-like qualities of his harmonies and the work ends in gloom. Pub. Russian Music Publishing Co.,1912.

**Opus 63. Two Poems**

Masque (No.1) is related harmonically to the last two opus numbers and Etrangeté (No.2) to Op.52 No.1. Both contain in their own way a mystic element. Pub. Russian Music Publishing Co.,1913.

**Opus 64. Sonata No.7**

Known as the 'White Mass'. Strongly related to Prometheus in thematic content, use of predominating chord and final ecstatic



dance. Also related in idea to the Satanic Poem and the 'Soul States' of the third sonata. Skryabin explores the bell-like qualities of his harmony as in the previous sonata. Pub. Russian Music Publishing Co., 1912.

### **Opus 65. Three Studies**

Technically very difficult. The first uses the interval of a ninth in the right hand throughout. In the second the melody is doubled at an interval of a seventh but the third is somewhat easier running along in fifths. Pub. Jurgenson, 1913.

### **Opus 66. Sonata No.8**

Founded on a single basic chord and has two development sections making it the longest of all the sonatas. There is also an ecstatic dance-like coda again. Pub. Jurgenson, 1913.

### **Opus 67. Two Preludes**

Looking beyond Prometheus the first piece is vague and mysterious. The second piece marked presto presents a mystical shimmering light. Pub. Jurgenson, 1913.

### **Opus 68. Sonata No.9**

Known as the 'Black Mass'. An extension of the ideas presented first in the Satanic Poem. Here we have all the elements of the composer's philosophical thought and style. This single movement work has a programmatic scheme, an ecstatic dance and opposing forces. Pub. Jurgenson, 1913.

### **Opus 69. Two Poems**

The first piece is tender and the second a charming reverie. A beautiful little diptych. Pub. Jurgenson, 1913.

### **Opus 70. Sonata No.10**

Here Skryabin simplifies the basic elements in his thought and style without changing his intention. Themes become more and more concentrated instead of being expanded until finally they are transformed in the usual climax. The piece exhibits a great radiant and joyful light. Pub. Jurgenson, 1913.

### **Opus 71 Two Poems**

These two pieces are related to the harmonic world of the eighth and ninth sonatas with chords exploring bell-like clashes and timbre. Pub. Jurgenson, 1914.

### **Opus 72. Towards the Flame**

Possibly intended to form part of a new sonata and closely related to Prometheus in idea and mood. It is a radiant piece ending in triumph. A good example of how Skryabin sustained harmonies over long periods. Pub. Jurgenson, 1914.

### **Opus 73. Two Dances**

Guirlandes (No.1) is based entirely on the opening upward phrase and the harmony contained therein, and in the second piece, *Flammes Sombres*, it is evident that there is a very strong mystic element. These pieces belong to the world of the eighth sonata. Pub. Jurgenson, 1914.

### **Opus 74. Five Preludes**

Skryabin's last piano pieces are varied in mood, the first being sad and reflective, the second meditative, the third dramatic, the fourth vague, and the last piece aggressive and war-like is the composer's final defiant statement. Pub. Jurgenson, 1914.



**Published by:**

S.J.Scott  
6, Colville Grove  
Sale, Cheshire M33 4FW  
England

ISBN 0953 2512 17